Early Childhood ISTAR-KR Assessment Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

As a condition of eligibility for Part B funds beginning with the 2004-2005 school year, schools must assess all early childhood students with disabilities. The Indiana Standards Tool for Alternate Reporting (ISTAR) is the assessment instrument that is recognized in Indiana for this purpose. The ISTAR assessment is intended to be an ongoing, integrated process. It should begin as teachers/therapists become familiar with incoming students. The state requires that the ISTAR-KR assessment for preschool students be updated each year. Annual data points are needed to measure progress for this population of students. Therefore, assessment is expected at entrance to preschool, exit from preschool, and every birthday in between, and is titled an interim assessment. However, the assessment tool can be used as a progress monitoring tool, and rated more than once per year.

Local Education Agencies (LEA) are required to provide the State Education Agency (SEA) with information necessary for the SEA to carry out its duty to collect information regarding performance goals. Indiana's State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report must document the extent of improvement of children with disabilities, ages three to five. Areas of focus are positive social-emotional skills, acquisition and use of knowledge and skills including early language/communication, early literacy, and use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs. Improvement in these areas is assessed with ISTAR. Assessments will be expected for any eligible students reported in the December 1 count.

This handbook has been created specifically to provide critical information on the ISTAR-KR assessment process for early childhood. It may be copied in part or in whole for local training purposes. Contents of this handbook, additional supportive training materials, and important updates are available electronically on the ISTAR website:

www.doe.in.gov

Frequently Asked Questions

1. General Description

What is ISTAR-KR?

Launched February 2009, ISTAR-KR is the updated version of the original ISTAR, which was designed to measure skills in children from infancy to kindergarten. The improvements to ISTAR were the result of research studies made possible by a federal General Supervision Enhancement Grant, conducted in 2005-08. ISTAR-KR is a derivative of the Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards and is aligned to the Indiana Core Standards for Kindergarten in the areas of mathematics, English/language arts and three functional areas, including: physical skills, personal care skills and social-emotional skills. This instrument is comprised of 30 performance threads of progressive skills, presented as rows of boxes containing the performance indicators. ISTAR-KR is a web-based, standards-referenced assessment system designed and provided by the Indiana Department of Education. It is available at no cost and can be used to monitor the progress of any early childhood student served in public and private facilities in Indiana.

2. Participation Guidelines

How does a student participate in the ISTAR-KR Assessment?

ISTAR-KR is an electronic progress monitoring system. Students do not actually "take" ISTAR-KR. The assessment utilizes ratings of student evidence by professionals and family members who know the child best.

Which students participate in the ISTAR-KR Assessment?

All students served in a Part B program require an ISTAR-KR assessment completed at service entry, annually at child's birthday, and upon exit from program services. Although this schedule represents the state minimum requirement, progress monitoring on a regular basis informs practice more effectively. Since 2007, ISTAR-KR has been available to community early childhood education settings serving children birth to five-years, e.g., Head Start and Early Head

Start programs, child care settings, faith-based pre-schools, university child care and pre-school programs.

3. Administrative Responsibilities

When does the ISTAR-KR assessment and reporting occur?

ISTAR-KR assessment should be collected naturally and periodically throughout the year. Local reporting can occur at any point in the year for individual and local purposes. All children eligible for Part B early childhood services are required to have an ISTAR-KR assessment finalized at the following three occurrences:

1. Within six weeks of entering a Part B preschool program;
2. Within six weeks of each birth date, and;
3. Within six weeks of exiting the preschool program.

Who is responsible for complete and accurate reporting?

ISTAR-KR is the responsibility of the educator who knows the child best. This person is assigned as the Teacher of Record in cases where the student has an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Collaboration is expected between service providers and family members.

How do I know which assessments are compliant and ready for state collection?

Administrators must verify that all reports are completed accurately and within required state timeline (see above). Both administrators and teachers will have access to a monitoring tool within the on-line program. This tool will track when assessments are due, based on the Part B guidelines listed above, and are complete, incomplete and overdue.

If a student moves, should I delete his/her records?

The ISTAR-KR records will be available to the receiving Indiana school corporation as soon as the student's STN is reassigned. These students can be re-added by the corporation where the STN is relocated without any loss of information.

Student names can be removed from a list without deleting any ISTAR-KR history. This option can be used for students who move out of Indiana, exit special education or transition to kindergarten.

4. Student Data

Where ARE the previous assessment data?

All assessment reports can be created from the Student Records icon/Student Reports tab. Use the Classic ISTAR Reports section to print assessments completed prior to February of 2009 and the ISTAR Matrix Reports section to print assessments completed after February of 2009. Many items/elements from the original ISTAR are part of the ISTAR-KR Matrix assessment and will be

visible on the assessment pages if the assessment items had been rated in an earlier assessment period.

Who is responsible for adding/editing student names to ISTAR-KR?

A student can be added to ISTAR through any account that has access to the school where the student is associated. The student's record will "belong" to the account that initially added the record until it is reassigned. Some school systems find it easier to have the teachers initially add and subsequently reassign the students from one caseload to the next. Other corporations place the students in the teacher accounts as a first step each year and set the demographic data.

The management style is a local decision and the software is designed to work with either plan. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of the school leadership to ensure completion in an accurate and timely manner.

If a student is already added to the list of a different account, the user of this account must "reassign" the student to the receiving user.

How do I add a student to my ISTAR-KR caseload?

On a nightly basis, the ISTAR/ISTART7 system is updated with the most current student information from the STN (Student Test Number) system. Therefore, continuous and proper use of the STN Lookup system is all that is required to populate the ISTAR/ISTART7 system with accurate student data.

The process of adding a student to the ISTAR assessment system is simply a matter of finding the correct student using the "add new" feature. All of the identifying data from the STN system will populate the student data fields.

How are Student Test Numbers associated with given schools and school corporations?

All students must be assigned a Student Test Number (STN) in order to be assessed with ISTAR-KR. The Student Test Number has no substantive meaning in isolation. There is a protocol that local data administrators use to assign STN's to students, and this is for the sole purpose of creating a unique identifier.

The STN of an early childhood student is not associated with Average Daily Membership (ADM) or Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) calculations. It is used for reports to the state that count children in early childhood programs and measure evaluation timelines. Security access and the ISTAR-KR data table require that all students be assigned an STN that technically belong to a "school". Schools may assign an STN number from the building in which the student's early childhood program is located. If the student's early childhood program is not in a school building, the STN may be assigned from the school building in which the student's Teacher of Record is located or by the neighborhood school that the child may attend later. As Part C agencies join the system, more specific instructions will be provided for this purpose.

The important requirements are:

1) There is only one STN assigned per student;
2) The STN must associated with a school; and
3) The rater must have access to the student by having access to the school where the student account is associated, by receiving additional access for any individual student, or by the reassignment of the student from a past rater to the account of the receiving rater.

How is confidentiality of student records assured?

Before users are able to log in to ISTAR, they must click "I Agree" to indicate that: 'The School Corporation has determined that I am, by definition, a school official who has legitimate educational interest in reporting and accessing ISTAR data. I am aware of my obligation to respect the confidentiality of student records as defined by the Family Educational Records Privacy Act (FERPA)." A website that explains this federal law is linked to the login page.

Anything entered into the system is encrypted. The network server maintains this encrypted data which cannot be read without specified access to the interface. Access to student records is controlled by the location of the account and the level of access established for that account, which is regulated by the creation and monitoring of user accounts at the local administrative level. Without a legitimate log-in, there is no access to the information -- a process considered by industry standard to be more secure that traditional paper files in a file cabinet.

Any access of student records is logged and this table of access can be retrieved at any time by an administrative account. It is the responsibility of the LEA to maintain the confidentiality of electronic records in the same manner as if the records were in a file cabinet in an office. As with any web-based system, security is dependent on access rights, not the physical location of the server. The ISTAR system resides at the Indiana Department of Education; however, the structure of the software and the parameters of state and federal law protect individual identities.

5. Assessment Process

Who enters the assessment data?

ISTAR-KR ratings are typically completed by the Teacher of Record, therapy providers and parents. When a student receives Part B services and participates in a community child care program, collaboration is expected between the Teacher of Record and providers at the community agency.

Several community early childhood education programs are utilizing ISTAR-KR accounts and could be granted access by the school corporation for those students shared with public school personnel.

How is ISTAR-KR scored?

Completion of ISTAR-KR requires users to have fundamental knowledge of the child's functioning across settings, to understand age expectations, to understand the content of the three OSEP child outcomes, and to know age expectations for a child's particular culture. In addition,

users will be most effective in completing ISTAR-KR when they enhance their observation skills outside of their particular discipline, promote positive team collaboration, and promote the belief that ongoing assessment is authentic --- based on child engagement in real life tasks in typical environments. (See chapter on Ongoing Assessment, Observation, and Documentation Tools, page #)

The three OSEP outcome areas reflect the whole child, engaged in everyday activities and routines in environments that support all areas of development. To consider skill level, think functionally within age-expectations, e.g., initiation of and response to social interactions; observing peer actions and imitating those actions into their play; purposeful actions to get needs met; use of skills across environments meaningful to the child. When completing ISTAR-KR standard areas, effective questions to answer for each performance item are: To what extent does the child show age-appropriate functioning, across settings and situations? Has the child demonstrated any new skills or behaviors related to the item since last assessment?

6. Scoring and Reporting

What is measured by ISTAR-KR?

The ratings are aligned to the Indiana Core Standards for Kindergarten in the areas of Mathematics and English Language Arts. In addition three functional areas are included: Physical, Personal Care, and Social-Emotional. To measure these areas comprehensively, ISTAR-KR comprises 30 performance threads of progressive skills. This student data is used to calculate the percentage of students who improved in three federal outcome areas: positive social-emotional skills, acquiring and using knowledge and skills, and taking appropriate action to meet needs.

What do the ISTAR-KR scores indicate?

In mathematics and English/language arts, scores represent the child's skill/age level on the assessment date compared to typically developing same- aged peers.

Scores on the functional indicators (physical, personal care, social-emotional) scores represent the child's level of independence on the assessment date compared to typically developing same aged peers.

7. Use of Results

How are the ISTAR-KR results used?

The federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) requires states to measure status and improvement in three child outcome areas: (1) positive social-emotional skills; (2) acquisition and use of knowledge and skills including early language/communication and early literacy; and (3) use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs. The ISTAR-KR standards categories are aligned to these outcomes areas for reporting purposes.

Local school corporations can use the assessment results to identify staff training needs, to determine program effectiveness, and to set program goals. Teachers and therapists can use

assessment results to make adjustments in curriculum and instruction. Assessment data will also assist the case conference committee in developing IEP goals and objectives.

Can ISTAR-KR be used over multiple years?

ISTAR-KR is designed with the potential to monitor individual student progress through kindergarten.

8. Training and Professional Development

How will school personnel be trained?

Overview and updates trainings are provided each year with the schedule posted on the department of education website. These trainings assist directors, coordinators, monitors, lead teachers, and similarly assigned personnel and new teachers. LEAs are responsible for providing local staff with updates to the ISTAR system.

To view the training schedule and access training materials, including handouts and, please visit this website: www.doe.in.gov

9. Research and Technical Information

How were the ISTAR assessments developed?

In 2006, the Indiana Department of Education, Family and Social Services Administration, Ball State University, and Pike Township were awarded a federal General Supervision Enhancement Grant in order to conduct a reliability and validation research study using the ISTAR Assessment tool. The purpose of the research study was to strengthen the comprehensive assessment and service provision for children with special needs, birth to age five.

Throughout the development and implementation process of ISTAR from 2003 to 2008, stakeholder groups have assembled to examine various design and validity questions and design important aspects of the assessment process. These groups have been integral to the quality of the modifications to ISTAR. Their work resulted in the most recent version of ISTAR, known as ISTAR-KR. Currently, a range of early childhood education programs use ISTAR-KR, including Head Start and Early Head Start programs, child care centers, preschools, and faith-based early education settings. The availability of ISTAR-KR to community/private early childhood education programs supports the services provided to all children birth to age five.

The Validity Argument for ISTAR-KR

In the simplest terms, the application of the results of an assessment can be considered valid if the assessment reliably measures what it is expected to measure and the interpretations of the results are reasonably defensible. The process of determining validity requires building a sound argument as to the degree to which evidence supports using the results as intended. It is misleading to proclaim that any assessment in and of itself is valid. The tool is just the

mechanism that serves to support valid conclusions. Validation involves outlining the purposes, contexts and conditions of interpretation that can be defended based on scientific research.

To build a validity argument around using ISTAR-KR to measure the progress of children in early childhood programs, the investigation centered on how well the items address the key skills expected of children before they enter kindergarten. Because of the federal requirement that the instrument measure growth, the score patterns must be able to chart a continuum of progress. The results must be useful in planning instruction as well as being meaningful for program evaluation.

There are many dimensions to building a validity argument. For this study, a number of key investigations were pursued through the analysis of reliability, alignment, concurrent validity, discriminant-groups validity, and construct validity. In addition, a robust standardization study produced information to allow the instrument to be calibrated into three month increments of growth.

To say that an instrument is reliable is to say that it will consistently be expected to produce the same score when variables are stable. On a reliability scale, the number 1 would signify a perfectly reliable instrument while numbers approaching 0 would be considered increasingly less reliable. Using Cronbach's α on the ISTAR subscale scores, the following reliability estimates were obtained: Language (0.978), Math (0.988) and Functional (.0923). These ratings would be considered exceptionally strong. However, reliability alone is not enough. Two clocks, for example, could reliably show the same time hour after hour with neither ever displaying the correct time.

Another set of studies were conducted to align the items in ISTAR with Indiana Academic Standards for kindergarten, with the three early childhood outcome statements required for federal reporting, and internally within the continuum of items themselves. Verifying that an assessment is aligned to the intended content in terms of in range of knowledge and balance of representation is critical. For these investigations, early childhood experts rated every item in terms of depth of knowledge on a scale of five. Additionally, for each item in ISTAR, raters identified the standards and outcome categories that these were judged to measure. Categorical concurrence was used to eliminate any item that did not have adequate alignment to the standards and outcomes that the instrument was intended to measure, thus assuring that only the strongest items representing a continuum of development were used in ISTAR-KR. In the end, the process produced a core set of items organized in alignment to each other and ultimately aligned to kindergarten readiness. In addition, items sets were identified which were determined to measure each of the three OSEP (Office of Special Education Programming, US DOE) outcome areas: (1) social skills, (2) acquisition of knowledge, and (3) behaviors to meet needs.

An analysis of concurrent validity was done to correlate a tested measure to a known measure so as to provide additional information on if the assessment is measuring what it is supposed to measure. In this case, ISTAR was correlated with AEPS (Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System), an established measure of early childhood skills. Children who did well on AEPS generally did well on ISTAR. The correlation of AEPS social subscale to the ISTAR social subscale was 0.487 and to the ISTAR Listen/Speak was .0544. Under acquisition of knowledge, the AEPS communication subscale correlated with the ISTAR language arts at 0.404. The AEPS adaptive scale correlated with the ISTAR physical care/personal care subscales at 0.459. This considered solid concurrent validity.

As part of this study, the scores of the group of children who were progressing typically were compared to the group of children who had been identified as having special needs. Controlling for age, there was a significant difference between the typical and identified groups (α=0.05) on

all subscales. In all cases, the typical group had a higher mean values than the identified group meaning that the instrumentation was able to distinguish these groups as expected.

Improvement areas in the design of the assessment were also discovered through this research. First, significant gaps were found to exist in the social emotional items. The structure of the assessment promoted some false assumptions in that all skills below a selected rating had been accomplished. Some of the language of the items was determined to be irrelevant to the activities of small children. Finally, some items appeared to add unnecessary bulk without serving a statistical or aligned purpose. The resulting improvements to the instrument were then vetted through a structured expert review and retested for alignment.

In the most recent study, over 500 typically developing children were assessed using ISTAR-KR. These subjects represented the racial and geographical population of children across the state grouped by age in three month increments. The resulting variance analysis projected a standardized score pattern for each age group from birth to 60 months old. A team of early childhood experts examined the results of this study and, using a bookmarking procedure, confirmed the lowest acceptable score to be considered "age-appropriate" for each age group on each of the performance matrices in ISTAR-KR.
The result of this effort is an assessment that can reasonably give information as to how a student is performing compared to typically developing peers on a continuum of skills leading to success in kindergarten. This score can be examined in terms of the three OSEP outcomes or in terms of the areas of pre-academics and can be used in the planning of effective instruction.

Requirements for the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), United States Department of Education

State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Plan (APP)
Each state is required to submit a proposal for SPP each December and a report of SPP/APR each February**. Part B Preschool Special Education Services is responsible for reporting on 3 Indicators:**

- **Indicator 6**: *Percent of preschool children with IEPs who received special education and related services in settings with typically developing peers (i.e., early childhood settings, home, and part-time early childhood/part-time early childhood special education settings).*

- **Indicator 7:** *Percent of preschool children with IEPs who demonstrate improved outcomes of:*
    1. *Positive social-emotional skills (including social relationships);*
    2. *Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills (including early language/communication and early literacy; and*
    3. *Use of appropriate behaviors to meet their needs.*

- **Indicator 12:** *Percent of children referred by Part C prior to age 3, who are found eligible for Part B, and who have an IEP developed and implemented by their third birthday.*

The Indiana State Performance Plan (SPP) for OSEP provides detailed instructions. OSEP expectations include:

- Annual report of children who exit services progress from entry service to exit in the following three outcomes:
    1. Positive social skills
    2. Acquiring and using knowledge and skills
    3. Taking appropriate action to meet needs

As a condition of eligibility for Part B funds, school must assess all early childhood students. ISTAR-KR is the assessment instrument recognized in Indiana for this purpose.

Each teacher and administrator plays a key role in satisfying federal requirements, and, more importantly, in providing the best possible outcomes related to these indicators for the children served.

OSEP Reporting Requirements: Part B Preschool Outcomes

The purpose of collecting outcome data is accountability. How is Indiana accountable to the federal funds received for special education services? How effective are the preschool special education services provided by Indiana schools? When Indiana preschool students leave early childhood services, are they ready to meet the learning standards in kindergarten?

Reporting to OSEP fulfills the following:

- Requirement to report IDEA 2004
- Provide information to the public, reported by LEAs
- Document effectiveness of Early Childhood Special Education services
- Data utilization
- Improve developmentally-appropriate practice, instruction, and positive outcomes for children
- Improve use of data to plan and implement effective curricula, assessments, interventions

These following outcomes are aligned to the areas measured through ISTAR-KR in five areas of extensions to the Indiana Academic Core Standards for mathematics and English/language arts and functional achievement indicators of physical skills, personal care skills, and social-emotional skills. The ISTAR-KR instrument is comprised of 30 performance threads/rows of progressive skills.
Indiana utilizes ISTAR-KR to document child improvement in the three OSEP outcomes:

Positive social-emotional skills

- thinking about relating to adults
- relating to other children
- and for preschool aged children – following rules related to groups or interacting with others
- includes attachment/separation/autonomy, expression of emotions and feelings
- and social interactions and play

Acquisition and use of knowledge and skills

- thinking, reasoning, remembering
- problem-solving; understanding symbols
- understanding the physical and social worlds
- includes early concepts of symbols, pictures, numbers
- pre-writing
- object permanence
- expressive language and communication

Use of appropriate behaviors to meet needs

- taking care of basic needs
- getting from place to place and using tools
- integrating motor skills to complete tasks
- self-help skills
- actions to get wants met
- engaging in play
- persisting in activities

Ongoing Assessment: Observation and Documentation

- **Assessment Defined**
- **Recommended Practices**
- **Observation: Questions to Guide Ongoing Assessment**
- **Completing ISTAR-KR Matrices**
- **Guidelines for using ISTAR-KR Progress Monitoring Tool: Detailed/Second Level Assessment**
- **Documentation Tool Examples**

Assessment Defined

Assessment is derived from the Latin word meaning ***to sit beside and get to know.***
It is well documented that the primary purpose of assessment in early childhood intervention is to design individual plans for instruction and therapy (Bagnato and Neisworth, 1997; Bricker et al., 2000; Sandall et al., 2000). IDEA (1997; 2005) requires that, "children's eligibility for early intervention shall be determined through a functional assessment conducted in the natural environment". Natural environment refers to the ongoing, routine, typical circumstances and contexts of a child that forms the basis for real-life learning and adaptation.

Bagnato & Yeh Ho (2006), note that "authentic assessment" refers to the systematic recording of developmental observations over time of the naturally occurring functional behaviors of young children in their daily routines by familiar and knowledgeable caregivers in the child's life.

Assessment for young children is the process of gathering information from several sources of evidence, organizing the evidence, and finally, interpreting the evidence, using it to inform instruction and monitor child progress. We assess young children to monitor development and learning, guide planning and decision-making, determine need for eligibility for special education services, and report and communicate results with others. The assessment process should provide information regarding what a child can do compared to age appropriate expectations. It may reveal interests and challenges to future learning. Assessment is not a single occurrence, but an ongoing process.

Recommended Practices

Whether the assessment is for the purpose of eligibility, ongoing assessment, or status at exit from services, the following is best practice: (NAEYC/DEC/DAP Assessment Standards & Practices)

- Natural observations of ongoing child behavior in everyday settings and routines versus contrived settings;
- Reliance on informed caregivers (teachers, parents team) to collect convergent multi-source data across settings;
- Curriculum-based measures linked to program goals, content, standards, and expected outcomes;
- Universal design; equitable assessment content and methods;
- Intra-individual child progress supplemented by inter-individual normative comparisons

An excellent resource for observation guidelines is Gaye Gronlund's and Marlyn James' book, *Focused Observations: How to Observe Children for Assessment and Curriculum Planning, 2005, Redleaf Press.* This resource links assessment and curriculum as interconnected ongoing practice. Teachers assess/observe to learn what skills the child knows and can do and what skills are emerging, then make decisions of what to do next to promote increased learning.

Observation: Questions to Guide Ongoing Assessment

Completing an assessment tool on a young child requires effective observation skills. Observing children active in their natural learning environment provides an opportunity to increase our knowledge of them and to determine what we know about a child, and enhances our interpretation of the child's development. Effective observation skills give a teacher the information needed to strengthen decision-making skills in the classroom. Early childhood teachers are observing everyday to determine progress and quality on: individual child outcomes, group outcomes, outcomes related to all children (e.g., Developmentally Appropriate, Indiana Academics Standards, OSEP outcomes).

Observing to gain knowledge about children – when, what, where:

- Observe children at arrival and departure
- Observe them during daily routines
- Observe them as they play and work with peers – inside and outside
- Talk with them about what are doing or making
- Ask them questions that encourage them to describe their thinking, listen
- Listen to them as they talk with others informally or in group discussions
- Study their work, e.g., projects, constructions, drawing, writing, journals – photograph their work
- When possible, observe in the home
- Invite parents to observe with you in the classroom
- Talk with family members to learn about their perspective on the child's learning, interests

Building effective observation skills includes answering the following questions: (1) What do I want to know? (2) How do I record the evidence? (3) How do I organize the evidence? (4) What do I do with what I learned? (J. Jablon, A. Dombro, & M. Dichtelmiller, 1999, 2007).

(1) What do I want to know?

- About an individual child
- About a family
- About particular skills, i.e., IEP Goals, Progress to Early Learning Standards
- About group dynamics
- About the physical environment
- About the effectiveness of my planning, interactions, instruction

(2) How do I record/document evidence?

Anecdotal record

Narrative descriptions of one child during or soon after observing, open-ended, include everything observed, non-evaluative – your eyes and ears are your camera.

Checklists

Designed to record the presence or absence of specific behaviors; can be for an individual or a group; easy to create your own; an advantage is the ease and quickness of completion; one caution, checklists do not provide rich detail.

Rating Scale

Developed to record something specific and require a judgment about the quality of what is observed; require little time to complete and are simple to complete; one caution – only pieces of actions/behaviors are included, so the observer needs a good understanding of the behavior being rated.

Participation Chart

Can be developed to record activity preferences, or length of time spent in activities, or with what type of support vs. independence.

Children's Work Sample

Meant to be collected over time to demonstrate growth, e.g., artwork, stories dictated or written, photographs, records of conversations, etc.; stored in chronological order.

Technology

Photographs, videotape, audiotapes, portfolios; requires written consent from family.

(3) How do I organize my documentation/data?

- Portfolio = folders of child work samples
- Colored box on each child's cubby
- Notebook per child
- Index cards in file box
- Create a CD of the child's work

(4) **What do I do with the knowledge I learned about a child?**

Observation and assessment are interchangeable and are ongoing processes. To be effective, they require you to watch, listen, take notes, reflect, collaborate with colleagues, plan, implement, ask questions, respond, watch, listen, take notes, reflect, and on and on and on….

✓ Review data, collaborate with team members – including family members

- ✓ Identify gaps between what a child is able to do, beginning to do, and what skills are next
- ✓ Develop IEP outcomes
- ✓ Transfer classroom observations to ISTAR-KR matrices
- ✓ Determine barriers to learning and identify modifications to support success
- ✓ Design intervention activities, make curriculum/activity modifications
- ✓ Implement intervention activities
- ✓ Reflect
- ✓ Observe, collect data
- ✓ Plan
- ✓ Implement

Completing ISTAR-KR Matrices

A. Gather Information

- ✓ Observe child over time engaged in everyday classroom routines and activities
- ✓ Discuss observations with family members and colleagues
- ✓ Request family members to complete a matrix or matrices to add to your observations

B. Interpret Performance Indicators

- ✓ Use the glossary (online or paper version) to clarify meaning of an indicator or behavior example;
- ✓ Review the descriptive behavior examples beneath the performance indicator boxes;
- ✓ Remember the two ISTAR Matrices "Rules"
- ✓ Use anecdotal notes to reflect expanded information regarding behavior exhibited or evidence of why you rated an indicator as achieved.
  (1) When a child has demonstrated MOST of the descriptive behavior examples, they have achieved the performance indicator,
  (2) When an indicator or behavior example is written in a plural, MORE THAN ONE is all that is required;

When considering *achievement* of skills, think about the child who consistently performs the skill as part of their functional behavior repertoire and performs the skill across environments, materials and people. We are defining *functional* as demonstrating a behavior independently even when modifications are necessary, e.g., sign language, picture board, walker, built-up spoon. Even when a skill is demonstrated independently yet the quality of performance is in question, a description of the quality becomes part of the evidence noted of how the child performs the skill.

C. Guidelines for using ISTAR-KR Progress Monitoring Tool: Detailed/Second Level Assessment

ISTAR-KR provides an effective tool for monitoring child progress on performance indicators, known as the Detailed or Second Level Assessment, renamed in 2010 *ISTAR-KR Progress Monitoring Instrument.* This progress monitoring tool provides incremental and

descriptive behavior examples of the next performance expectation a child is learning. The rubric criteria are rated within the range of: introduced, emerging, developing, ongoing, demonstrated, applied. When a child is just building a skill, this rubric will be useful in observing change over time, and curriculum activities or adaptations will be more readily developed when using this Progress Monitoring Instrument. A rating scale can be easily adapted for classroom observation use.

Documentation Tool Examples

We understand that it may be challenging for teachers to use the on-line ISTAR-KR on a daily basis, and we know that they may prefer to use an "on-the-go" daily method to document their observations prior to completing the ISTAR-KR matrices. Early childhood teachers believe that observation is essential to capture child progress and to accurately assess child outcomes. And, teachers know that observation can only be productive if there is also a commitment to an efficient documentation method. Finding the "right" documentation tool to support the pace of the busy early childhood classroom takes creativity and practice.

We offer documentation tool examples in the Appendices that may be of use for an "on-the-go" option, or give inspiration to enhance a method already in use. Documentation methods used by teachers and must be **accessible** and **aligned to the assessment tool used**. These "on-the-go" examples may be a useful addition to your documentation methods to further enhance the accuracy of ISTAR-KR completion.

ISTAR-KR Matrices include an anecdotal note section for documenting evidence of child progress. This could be a place to summarize collected documentation notes. In addition, ISTAR-KR offers the option of attaching evidence, e.g., photographs, child work sample, etc. This option is available per matrix page, and is then archived in the File Cabinet in Student Records. Completed documentation tools can be scanned into a person computer then attached/uploaded into the ISTAR-KR matrices.

See appendices for documentation tool examples, beginning on page 38.

Using ISTAR-KR Data to Improve Planning and Expected Outcomes: Progress Monitoring & Data Analysis

- **The Use of Data**
- **The Purpose of Data**
- **Progress Monitoring**
- **Early Learning Standards**

The Use of Data in Early Childhood Special Education

To be able to effectively use data, start with outcomes. An outcome is simply an expected result following instruction or intervention. In the early childhood world of special education, there are different levels of outcomes: Program, Child & Family Outcomes, i.e., *Early Intervention programs provide high quality services and supports; families know their rights and advocate effectively for their children; children have positive social relationships*. Also, data collection occurs at multiple levels: state, federal, district, classroom, individual student. The following stakeholders each have a role to understand outcomes, data collection, and data analysis: Office of Special Education (OSEP), Indiana Department of Education, Office of Differentiated Learners, District Administrators, School Administrators, and Teachers.

The Purpose of Data

The purpose of state special education data is to demonstrate accountability for federal funding used to provide services to children 3 to 5 years old eligible for services, and to answer the question: *Are programs accomplishing what they are intended to accomplish?* Data needs to be collected in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the program. Individual student assessment is collected to demonstrate program quality and can be analyzed to determine program effectiveness per class, per school, per corporation, and at the state program level.

Classroom data demonstrates accountability to the federal funding source. Teachers collect student assessment data, which school corporations use to ensure assessment requirements to the Indiana Department of Education. The state collects and reviews the data to determine developmental change for students who received special education services a minimum of six months who exit each school year. This data analysis is compiled and forwarded to the federal government. Measuring outcomes for accountability is our mandate. Implementing ongoing progress monitoring is best practice when serving young children in programs.

Progress Monitoring

To monitor progress of child change is to collect evidence of how the child responds to intervention/instruction. This evidence guides decision-making based on a pattern of performance. Achievement of child outcomes comes about when ongoing progress monitoring is completed, documented, and evaluated to inform instruction.

Frequently collecting child performance data frequently supports monitoring short-term objectives and long-term outcomes. A critical factor in outcome and objective development is measurability – how will we know the child has achieved the outcome?

When developing IEP goals and objectives, measurement must be part of the thought process. And, the expectation of designating time for systematic observing to provide the measurement is essential. The following guidelines may be useful:

(1) Determine the purpose and outcome of the goal: what will be the observable outcome when the goal is achieved; all team members agree on and understand the purpose and outcome.
(2) Make the statement of student progress specific.
(3) Determine the types of data needed to provide evidence of student progress.
(4) Determine where data should be collected to provide documentation of the skill.
(5) Determine how often evidence will be collected.

A checklist to determine effective goal content is available in **Appendix L**.

For federal purposes, Indiana preschool students who receive special education services are required to have ISTAR-KR completed at service entry date, at annual birth date, and at exit from preschool services date. This data will demonstrate the child's developmental change from entrance to exit of services. However, it is recommended to be used as a regular progress monitoring tool as often as it would be meaningful to the program, (i.e. quarterly). A Compliance Monitoring Report, available to administrators and teachers in the ISTAR database, serves as a time management tool to ensure timely completion of the assessment for each child.

Early Learning Standards

ISTAR-Kindergarten Readiness (KR), an enhancement to the original ISTAR assessment, was derived from the Indiana's Early Learning Standards -- the Foundations to the Indiana Academic Standards. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Association of Early Childhood Specialist in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) support the position that early learning standards can be a valuable part of a comprehensive, high-quality system of services for young children and contribute to young children's educational experience and future success. NAEYC and NAECS/SDE identify four essential features of Early Learning Standards:

(1) Effective early learning standards emphasize significant developmentally-appropriate content and outcomes.
(2) Effective early learning standards are developed and reviewed through informed, inclusive processes.
(3) Early learning standards gain their effectiveness through implementation and assessment practices that support all children's development in ethical, appropriate ways.
(4) Effective early learning standards require a foundation of support for early childhood programs, professionals, and families.

Data Collection and Analysis

The purpose of data collection and analysis is to determine progress of a student, and to inform instruction in an effort to promote further skill development. Another purpose of data collection and analysis is to report progress of students, as well as the quality of program services to families, school corporations, and the state.

When a provider analyzes the data over time, analysis will help identify whether sufficient progress is evident. When progress is not sufficient, these questions need to be answered:

- ✓ Has the learning opportunity/intervention been implemented as intended?
- ✓ Is the target behavior one that may not initially and rapidly respond to intervention?
- ✓ Is the intervention strong enough to address the target behavior?

Data analysis includes reviewing the measurement tools and reports of child performance over time, i.e., ISTAR-KR reports, rating scales, student portfolios, and other collection tool. (See chapter 2 for examples). Collection of data is the initial step in evaluating student performance. The second step of data collection is to organize the data. Graphic representation of data can support effective analysis of student performance over time, enabling the use of the data to inform instruction and intervention strategies – the true purpose of assessment and path to outcome achievement.

Graph reports reflect two phases of data collection and monitoring the target behavior: the **Baseline** phase, or the time period of what the target behavior looks like at the beginning of service and collection of data; and the **Intervention** phase, the time period where instruction is implemented to address the target behavior and objectives leading to the target behavior. Performance change is marked to reflect progress towards the target behavior during the observation time period.

Graphic representation of data can be developed through the ISTAR-KR assessment of an individual. Electronic reports, available in fall of 2010, will demonstrate comparison of several data points per student. Providers can also develop data comparisons using paper or pencil or accessing Microsoft Excel on their computer to customize student data collection.

From Goals to Instruction: Adjusting Curriculum

- **Foundational Knowledge**
- **Effective Early Childhood Learning Environments**
- **Considerations of Universal Design for the Early Childhood Classroom**
- **Connecting Learning Standards to Practice and Curriculum**
- **General Curriculum Modification/Adaptation Principles**

Foundational Knowledge

Goals - what we want children to learn – the end result of teacher's/child's effort.

Early Childhood Curriculum - "Curriculum is what happens." Dittman, (1977) NAEYC. Although curriculum is everything that happens in a classroom, it is not random or left to chance. To be effective, curriculum must include thoughtful planning and implementation. Curriculum is the "what" of the content that can be taught, the "method" used to determine what content to teach each child, and the "methods" used to ensure that the identified content for each child is acquired and used, Wolery and Sainato (1993).

Well-implemented early childhood curriculum provides developmentally appropriate support and cognitive challenges and, therefore, is likely to lead to positive outcomes (Freed, 1998).

The Commission on the National Association for the Education of Young Children Early childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, 2003 states, "Curriculum that is goal oriented and incorporates concepts and skills based on current research fosters children's learning and development."

Plan learning experiences based on what is known of young children in general and individually, as well as the sequential process in which children learn specific concepts and skills. This is done with consideration of individual interests, strengths, and needs, building on prior knowledge and skills.

An effective educational program combines the following in planning:

- ✓ Curriculum Content – what children are to learn, including individual child goals and objectives
- ✓ Learning Processes – how children learn
- ✓ Instructional Strategies – how to teach
- ✓ Environment – the learning context
- ✓ Assessment Strategies – how to know that learning has occurred and what curriculum adjustments are needed

Evidence-based Practice – information regarding historical practices that has been effective in the past. While the early education literature sites many evidence-based practice resources, it is the teacher's own research/observation of a particular child and measurement of the outcomes and interventions implemented for that child which results in the most effective approach to inform their decision-making on how to teach, what to teach, and where to teach that child.

Standards - According to The Early Childhood Education Assessment Consortium of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), www.ccsso.org 2005, standards are statements that describe expectations for the learning and development of young children across the domains of: health and physical well-being; social and emotional well-being; approaches to learning; language development and symbol systems; and general knowledge about the world around them.

Instruction – guides, teaches, and promotes knowledge by creating an engaging environment and building trusting relationships.

Authentic Assessment – the systematic recording of development over time of the naturally occurring and useful behaviors of young children during typical daily routines by familiar and knowledgeable caregivers (Bagnato and Yeh Ho 2006). When teachers guide children's play and exploration, interact with children, help them with things that are difficult, encourage children to try new things, and join in children's excitement when they accomplish something – all of these encompasses authentic assessment.

Early Childhood Learning Environments

Young children learn when interacting with adults and peers and when engaged in play experiences to investigate, problem-solve, and reflect. A high quality learning environment is one in which teachers/adults arrange for meaningful experiences that stimulate intellect and creativity, promote exploration, include social engagement, and encourage children's active and sustained involvement. Effective teachers/adults are those who respect and nurture young children, and are who available to young children for frequent interactions.

Indicators of Effective Early Childhood Learning Environments: (Copple and Bredekamp, 2006)

- ✓ Are responsive and predictable
- ✓ Engage children to be active
- ✓ Are guided by goals that are clear and shared by personnel and families
- ✓ Demonstrate teaching and curriculum that are flexible and matched to the child and activities
- ✓ Are characterized by curriculum which evidenced-based
- ✓ Provide developmentally-appropriate materials, activities, and interactions
- ✓ Provide multiple opportunities for learning
- ✓ Promote experiences that promotes learning through investigation and play
- ✓ Ensure teaching is focused and intentional
- ✓ Encompass curriculum which builds on prior knowledge and experiences
- ✓ Provide curriculum that is comprehensive – physical well-being, motor development, social-emotional development, approaches to learning; language development; cognition and general knowledge; subject matter areas such as science, mathematics, language, literacy, social studies, and the arts
- ✓ Include professional standards that validate the curriculum's subject-matter content
- ✓ Include curriculum that is likely to benefit children

Planning for All Children: Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

Ron Mace of the Center for Universal Design defines UD (UD) as a philosophy of designing and creating products and environments to be accessible to the greatest extent possible, to the

people who use them, without the need for adaptation. Universal Design has its origins in architecture and urban planning to increase accessibility for persons with disabilities. Consider these examples of Universal Design, i.e., automatic doors, ramps, curb cuts. However, those examples not only provide access to persons with disabilities, but to all us. Think of when you are pushing a stroller or are pulling a suitcase luggage and use a curb cut or ramp - are these experiences you now take for granted?

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was introduced by CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology), a leading authority on applying Universal Design to educational opportunities for students with disabilities through the development and innovative uses of technology. Basically, UDL offers a structure to create flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessment that accommodate learner differences. Individualizing for a young learner is a basic tenant of effective early childhood practice. Early childhood educators have experience in designing a variety of approaches to meet the needs of young children in their classroom. The UDL approach would appeal to early childhood educators due to the following principles of universally-designed curriculum (CAST n.d.):

- Multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge,
- Multiple means of action and expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know, and
- Multiple means of engagement to identify learners' interests, challenge them appropriately, and motivate them to learn.

Taking this approach to planning the learning environment is something effective early childhood educators do every day. They begin with what their goals are for all children, (i.e., promote the optimal child development and learning and the successful participation of children in routines and activities). What does this look like? Some examples include: active engagement by students, participation, learning, positive social relationships.

For some children, modifications to routines and activities are often necessary. In *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs, 2nd Edition, 2008,* Sandall and Schwartz suggest a starting point of making a classroom assessment. They offer a checklist to evaluate overall classroom practice, *Quality Classroom Assessment Form and Classroom Action Form,* (see Appendix for an adaptation of the checklist). It is a simple form of 10 indicators used to document "Yes", "No", "Not Sure", and examples. Some examples of indicators are:

- ✓ *Do children spend most of their time playing and working with materials or with other children?*
- ✓ *Do teachers work with individual children, small groups, and the whole group at different times during the day?*
- ✓ *Is the classroom decorated with children's original artwork, their own writing, and stories they've dictated?*
- ✓ *Do children work on projects and have periods of time to play and explore?*
- ✓ *Do teachers read books to children individually or in small groups throughout the day?*
- ✓ *Do children have an opportunity to play and explore outside every day?*

A next step in planning a quality learning environment for all children is to ensure a predictable routine or schedule is provided for the children, i.e., divided into time segments appropriate for children's needs and abilities; offer a balance of child-initiated activities and teacher-initiated

activities; include adequate time for routines and transitions; maximize teaching and learning and minimize waiting time.

In addition to overall classroom practices that are appropriate for all children, two other strategies to support individual learning needs of some children, ***Child-Focused Instructional* Strategy and Embedded Learning Opportunities,** are offered in the *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs, 2008.* The examples below demonstrate how ISTAR-KR performance indicators can be evidenced in any context and that requires planning for opportunities for demonstration of a skill/concept in the most accessible way.

Child-Focused Instructional Strategy is defined as a strategy that is specific to an individual child who is challenged to learn from the usual curriculum; and, the skills, behaviors, or concepts to be learned are unique to the child. Examples of child specific learning needs are, English vocabulary words for a child who is an English language learner, progressive steps to sustain interactions with peers, unfastening/fastening clothing while toileting (all ISTAR-KR performance indicators). Strategies to support those learning needs could be, instruction, prompting strategies, consequence strategies (i.e., positive reinforcement, corrective feedback).

Embedded Learning Opportunities is defined as learning opportunities that are integrated into classroom activities and routines that are applicable to a child's specific individual learning objectives and are characterized by short systematic instruction and interactions. Examples may include, a plan to practice of asking questions during arrival/departure, sort by size in dramatic play area with dishes and manipulative area, following rules when playing board games (all reflect ISTAR-KR performance indicators).

In other words, when authentic assessment is valued by the adults working with young children, the naturally occurring routines and activities found in preschool classrooms or other typical environments will by where children can demonstrate their skills and evidence can be collected.

Connecting ISTAR-KR Performance Expectations to Practice and Curriculum

Classroom teachers keep much in mind when planning for students in their care. There are IEP goals, there are ISTAR-KR Performance Expectations, and possibly there are other pertinent requirements to meet, i.e., Head Start Child Outcome Framework.

When using ISTAR-KR, the early learning standards are embedded within the assessment tool. Let's look at a simple way to embed early learning standards into practice. An excellent resource to access is *Making Early Learning Standards Come Alive, Connecting Your Practice and Curriculum to State Guidelines,* by Gaye Gronlund, 2006, Redleaf Press. Ms. Gronlund offers an efficient and practical system to make the standards beneficial to all children in a developmentally appropriate way, meaningfully assess children's progress, and provide the state agency with accountability related to the outcomes of tracking progress and increasing child success in the classroom.

View **Appendix I, page 53,**, for a useful visual tool for linking the early learning standard into practice. Highlights include:

- The Standard
- What Common Practices occur in an Early Childhood Classroom Where the Standard May be Addressed

- What Children Might Demonstrate: First Steps, Making Progress, Accomplishing the Standard

Ms. Gronlund's system begins with a new way of thinking and seeing work with children:

In order to meet the standard of _____, we must do/provide/encourage this activity.

Intentional lesson planning is the next step to this new way of thinking and seeing, and includes the standards in the lesson or activity plan, (**see example in Appendix J, page 54**). This method reminds the teacher that assessment and curriculum planning must go hand in hand. As teachers observe children to learn about progress toward learning expectations, they are naturally making decisions about what to do next.

General Curriculum Modification/Adaptation Principles

In high-quality early childhood classrooms, it is common to see activities and materials that will meet the needs of many children with or without disabilities. However, the needs of a specific child can result in specific adaptations or modifications for an activity, routine, or in the environment. The purpose of adaptations is to promote a child's successful participation in everyday routines and activities. When we design an adaptation of an activity or routine for a specific need of a child, we have increased the potential for true learning to take place. Any child must be actively engaged in the learning experience to acquire new skills.

Common categories of general adaptations:

- Adapt Environment: room set-up, or adapt/select equipment
- Adapt Activity or Routine
- Adapt Materials
- Adapt Requirements or Instruction
- Provide Instruction

It is important to reiterate that the goal of any adaptation is to ensure the highest level of child participation with the least amount of assistance as possible. When teachers design appropriate adaptations for a particular child's needs, it is helpful to consider the collaborative potential of their instructional community, e.g., teachers, assistant teachers, therapy providers, and family members. Thoughtful decision-making is at the core of creative and successful adaptations.

A helpful structure for decision-making taken from CARA's Kit, 2007:

1. Identify the child's needs by evaluating his/her performance: What is actually happening in particular routines and activities?
    i. Language & Literacy Activities
    ii. Group Meeting/Circle Meeting
    iii. Table Top Activities (manipulatives, puzzles, pre-writing)
    iv. Active Learning & Movement Activities
    v. Routine Transitions Between Activities
    vi. Arrival & Departure
    vii. Community Outings (walks, field trips)

2. Decide what you would like to see happen. What isn't happening?
    i. What would you like to see happening?
    ii. What would the child/children be doing?
    iii. What would the adults be doing?
    iv. How would the environment look?
    v. What would you like to hear happening (voices, background sounds, particular sounds relating to the situation, etc.)?
3. Consider adaptations to try. This step may need to be repeated when an adaptation does not promote the desired result.
4. Select adaptations you will try.
5. Plan for successful implementation by scheduling an evaluation process to answer these questions:
    i. Why am I making the adaptation?
    ii. How will the adaptation improve the activity or routine?
    iii. What steps will I take to make the adaptation?
    iv. How will I know if the adaptation is working? What will I see and hear that will tell me the adaptation has improved or changed the situation?
6. Try the adaptation daily for at least a week. Review the answers in #5 and #2.

From Goals to Curriculum Adjustment – An Example

ISTAR-KR includes a Second Level or Detailed Assessment, **to be renamed in the fall of 2010, as the Progress Monitoring Tool.** Specific rubric criteria can be correlated to best practices of adapting curriculum activities. A continuum of most intrusive to least intrusive of supports is the goal of effective adaptations. Gradually fading supports promotes incremental steps to greater independence of task completion. From the *Effective Goal Processes Handbook*, (McGrath, 2009), the following is an example of a Goal and Rubric Criteria which illustrates the implementation of adjusting a curriculum activity to support goal achievement.

Student: Jacob is a 5-year old diagnosed with pervasive developmental disorder NOS.

Expected Outcome: Jacob is expected to function in a classroom with his peers.

Present Levels/What is Happening: Jacob is unable to play meaningfully with other children due to an inability to engage in reciprocal interaction.

Needs of Student: Jacob needs to understand the behavior that is expected of him, and he needs guided practice to execute this behavior appropriately.

Annual Goal: During structured play, Jacob will exchange a preferred item with a peer without adult assistance 4 out of 5 days.

Services: A communication specialist will shape Jacob's behavior by providing Jacob with picture cards to illustrate the skill of giving a toy to a peer. Jacob will watch videos of other children sharing. Then, Jacob will be assisted in sharing items that are not his most preferred items. Finally, Jacob will be reward for demonstrating this behavior with reduced prompts.

Progress Monitoring: A member of the early childhood staff will observe Jacob during structured play activities and record incidents of sharing.

Standard(s) / Element(s) Aligned to the Goal: Functional-Social-Emotional, Interpersonal Skills, Engages in cooperative interactions

<u>Rubric Criteria/Continuum of Expected Behaviors:</u> This illustration reflects how a child demonstrates progress towards the desired behavior. The continuum of assistance and cues are reduced while the task is made more challenging.

Introduced: Jacob will watch a video of children exchanging items. Then he will be given picture cues for sharing.

Emerging: During structured play, Jacob will exchange a neutral item with an adult using picture cues 5 out of 5 days.

Developing: During structured play, Jacob will exchange a neutral item with a peer with adult assistance and picture cues 2 times a week.

Ongoing: During structured play, Jacob will exchange a preferred item with a peer with adult assistance 2 out of 5 days.

Demonstrated: During structured play, Jacob will exchange a preferred item with a peer with adult prompting 4 out of 5 days.

Applied: During structured play, Jacob will exchange a preferred item with a peer without adult assistance 4 out of 5 days.

The Importance of High Quality Learning Environments in Achieving Child Outcomes

"A quality learning environment empowers children to become confident learners" (Greenman J., 1998).

A 2006 report from the National Association of State Boards of Educators' (NASBE) Study Group on Creating High Quality Early Learning Environments echoes this statement from Greenman. In a review of the literature on quality the study group found overwhelming evidence that high quality learning environments can produce important positive outcomes for children. Establishing a setting where all children can learn and develop optimally depends upon the quality of the environment provided. Preschool educators should use all that they know about how young children learn to nurture, protect, and provide for the well-being of all children (Executive Version, October 2006). The study group concluded that what is most critical in quality learning environments is having highly trained and well-supported teachers that can provide responsive interpersonal relationships, nurture children's dispositions to learn, and cultivate their emerging abilities. Teachers in high quality environments ensure that children:

- are respected, nurtured, and challenged and enjoy frequent interaction and communication with peers and adults;
- have ongoing opportunities to learn important skills, knowledge, and dispositions in classrooms that provide materials and activities that are individualized and challenge children intellectual development and
- acquire sills necessary to learn basic school readiness proficiencies and knowledge in such areas as expanded vocabulary and alphabetic principles; phonological awareness; concepts of numbers; areas of language and literacy; shapes, measurement, and spatial relations; task persistence; early scientific thinking; ;and information about he world and how it works (p.8).

Drawing from the work of numerous researchers and national experts the NASBE study group developed a list of critical elements for environmental consideration:

- use of a comprehensive state standards for preschool programs
- rich, coherent curriculum
- strong foundation in language and emergent literacy
- appropriate assessment that informs instruction
- responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity
- inclusion of children with disabilities
- partnerships with parents
- small class sizes and low adult-child ratios

high quality teachers who capitalize on young children's "eagerness to learn" (pp. 9-10)

A quality environment is one in which the teacher is intentional in encouraging communication and reasoning skills, providing *frequent* verbal feedback, and maximizing children's engagement in learning opportunities (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998). It requires teachers to be highly responsive; blending child directed discovery and teacher provided explicit information. "The possibilities in a high quality learning environment are endless…for making new discoveries, inventing, creating, and learning. This environment invites children to just be" (Bunnett & Davis, 1997) Staff must arrange environments to be inviting, encouraging, participatory and respectful. The three major roles a teacher takes within this environment include acting as an environmental planner, environmental participant and environmental evaluator. (Greenman J., 2005,

pp. 66-67) Within each role the teacher is observing, recording, facilitating, adjusting and making necessary changes in order that children have optimal opportunities to gain the most from the leaning environment.

By combining the following factors of a high quality environment learning can occur all the time: (1) young children are young children, they learn through play and (2) by getting to know each child as an individual, teachers can create a community of learners by building on their strengths, interests, and competencies. Teachers need to take an insightful educated look at learning goals for children and ask themselves, "Does my classroom environment support what we know is best for all children?" As Greenman states (2005) "Our job as educators is to set up a quality environment that works for all the children in our care."

To ensure quality environments we must provide for the three basic needs all children have: (1) protection for their health and safety, (2) access to supportive and nurturing relationships that includes parents, extended family and community and (3) opportunities for stimulation and learning (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 1998). There are critical dimensions of an early childhood setting that must be considered in setting up a high quality environment (Adapted from Greenman J., 2005 pp. 97-124):

Comfort& Softness

Comfort is subjective, and like everything else, culture bound. It has to do with softness, responsiveness, familiarity, and a reasonable level of sensory stimulation – neither too much nor too little, that leads to a sense of calm. A comforting and soft environment reaches out to children and envelops them. It creates areas that help children to feel more secure, enabling them to venture out and explore the world.

Competence

Creating a sense of feeling sure and at ease, a place where you feel successful, achieve goals and not mess up. Environments support competence through the following: having appropriate expectations, appropriate scale, clear organization, a variety of things to do and places to do them, and a profound understanding and acceptance of the diversity of skills and limitations that children and adults possess and a commitment to accommodation.

Safety

A safe environment is at the top of any list of goals for caring and educating young children, yet there is always a trade-off between avoiding all injuries now and learning how to handle challenges that occur in early education settings. Educational settings are where the resources and know-how should be available to *safely* offer experiences that challenge and teach children.

Health

Health issues involve a delicate balance in all dimensions of the environment. They require a balance between sterility in the human sense and sterility in a healthy sense. The environment must be clean and sanitary while being a warm and welcoming place where children feel free to explore, manipulate and engage with the materials and equipment within the environment.

Privacy & Social Space

Early childhood environments are social settings but again there is a balance that must be maintained which is crucial for children to grow and develop socially and emotionally. Opportunities for alone time, a retreat from the chaos while encouraging social interactions is necessary for preparing children for engaging in the real world.

Order
Environments for young children require ordered time and space – space that furthers the program goals while making the environment a pleasant place to be. What is needed is planned complexity – an environment rich enough to challenge, but not so complex as to frustrate. This type of order provides a comforting framework that does not harshly interrupt the activities of children; instead the order allows for more experiences and for children to anticipate their day.

Routines & Rituals
Routines and rituals in early education settings "reassure against the unknown void". They help children find order in the day and become anchors of security. Daily group activities like sharing the same song or the same story day after day reassures children. The daily snack time or bathroom routine helps children feel that there are dependable and reliable things that can be counted on to happen day after day, week after week.

Autonomy
Young children need an environment where they can learn to balance their desire to be independent with their adjustment to the demands of the larger world. The child's environment in the words of Erik Erikson, "must back him up in his desire to stand on his own two feet." To "back him up," the environment must provide the support and structure – physical space, time, expectations – that encourages independence in thought and action "but protects him against the potential of his yet untrained judgment" (1977, p. 50).

Mobility
There are two categories of mobility in early childhood environments: freedom to move within the setting from place to place or activity to activity, and the amount of mobility allowed or required by the routines and activities. Mobility in the environment is a function of physical space, staffing, program ideology, and the predispositions of teachers and children alike. A major task for early childhood teachers is to design environments that allow more free expression of movement indoors.

Security
A sense of security is bound up with all other dimensions. Children feel secure when they can "safely relax", where they feel safe, are in a familiar place, and with people they trust. There are four pillars of security: people, place, routine and ritual. Within the environment children find a world that is predictable, manageable, and fits their individual concerns. The environmental load is manageable for them.

Adult Dimension
The environment must also support staff and parents. All the dimensions for children apply to adults as well. The quality of work is clearly affected by the work setting. Morale and staff satisfaction are directly affected by the quality of the facility or classroom and the manner in which the facility and classroom supports or works against the staff.

There are several measures available to assess the quality of environments for young children. Listed below are the most widely used across a variety of early childhood programs.

- Classroom Observation System (COS): NICHD Study of Early Child Care & Youth Development, n.d.

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R); Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 1998.

- National Association for the Education of Young Children (2007). *NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria. The Mark of Quality in Early Childhood Education (Revised Edition).* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

- Observational Record of the Caregiving Environment (ORCE) Early Child Care Research Network (ECCRN), 2001.

- The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS); Piante, LaParo, and Hamre, 2004.

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National Association of State Boards of Education (2006). *Fulfilling the Promise of Preschool: The Report of the NASBE Study Group on Creating High Quality Early Learning Environments; Executive Version.* Alexandria, VA: NASBE.

Additional Resources for Environments

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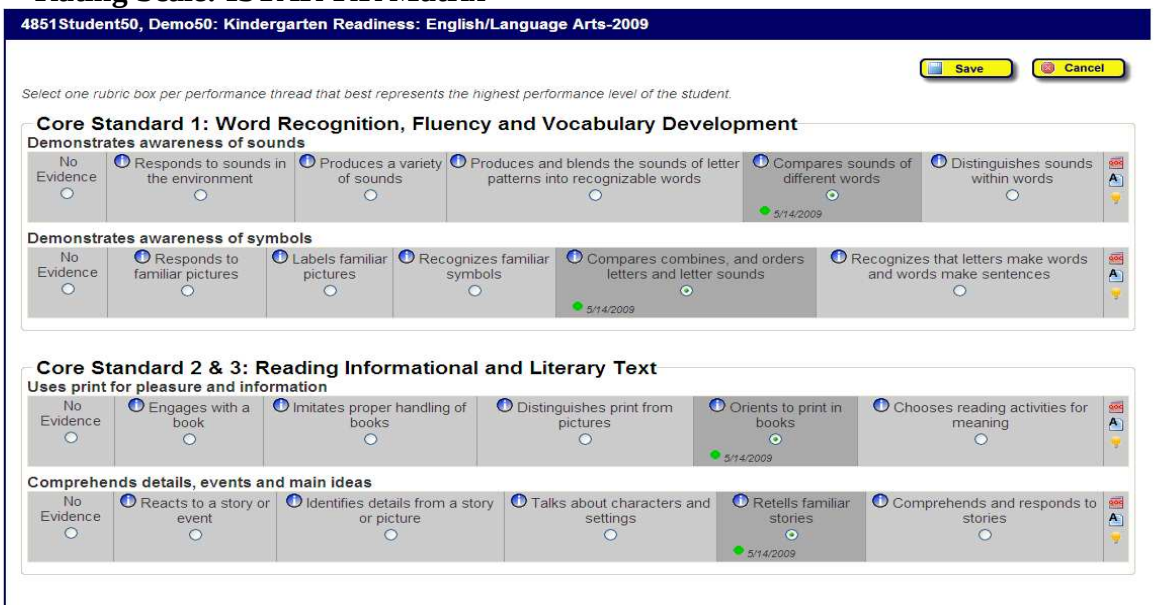
Appendix A

Rating Scale: ISTAR-KR Matrix



Appendix B

Anecdotal Records may include:

- ✓ **Identify the child and child's age;**
- ✓ **Include the date, time of day, and setting;**
- ✓ **Identify the observer;**
- ✓ **Provide an accurate account of the child's actions, including quotes;**
- ✓ **Include responses of peers and/or adults, if any are involved;**
- ✓ **Are non-evaluative;**
- ✓ **The Observation record can be added to a ISTAR-KR matrix**

Name of School:	
Child's Name:	**Date:**
Child's Age: **Years**	**Months**
Setting:	**Time:**
Observer:	
Observed: **Observer Name:**	**Date:**

Appendix C: Checklists

Checklist 1. - Individual: Quick and easy to complete; documents the presence or absence of a skill, but not the quality of the performance.

School:		
Childs's Name:		
Child's Age: **Years** **Months**		
Date of Observation:		
Observer:		
Matrix Area: **Number Sense**		
Indicators:	**YES**	**NO**
Demonstrates awareness of presence of object		
Identifies more		
Uses numbers to compare		
Describes relationships between numbers and quantity		
Names & orders quantities		
Manipulates objects for a purpose		
Matches objects and sets		
Makes a set of objects smaller or larger		

Checklist 2. – Group: Quick and easy to complete; efficient when observing a group of children; a quick snapshot.

	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name	Name
Skill							
Skill							
Skill							
Skill							
Skill							

Checklist 3. – Daily/Individual: Another version to identify progress on goals

Daily Monitoring Record											
Student:				**1st - 9 week term**			**Begin Date:**				**End Date:**
	Date										
Goal	**Week 1**	**Week 2**	**Week 3**	**Week 4**	**Midterm**	**Week 5**	**Week 6**	**Week 7**	**Week 8**	**Week 9**	**End**

Appendix D: Participation Charts

Participation Chart 1:

ACTIVITY PREFERENCES DURING SELF-SELECTED PLAY								
	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME
9:00-9:10								
9:10-9:20								
9:20-9:30								
9:30-9:40								
9:40-9:50								
9:50-10:00								
A=Art; B=Block Building; DP=Dramatic Play; M=Manipulatives; S=Sensory; SC= Science								

Participation Chart 2:

ACTIVITY CHOICE RECORD		
DATE:		CHILD(REN):
Art	Dramatic Play	Manipulatives
Science/Math	Music/Movement	Library

Appendix E: Rating Scales

Rating Scale 1. – Progress Monitoring Tool:

Social-Emotional Rating Scale

Child's Name: Date:
Child's Age: Years Months
Observer:

Item	Not Evident	Introduced	Emerging	Developing	Ongoing	Demonstrated	Applied
Sense of Self & Others							
Demonstrates self-awareness							
Demonstrates independence							
Engages with others							
Demonstrates respect for self and others							
Manages Emotions							
Expresses a variety of emotions							
Responds to a variety of emotions							
Manages emotions with adult assistance							
Uses strategies to manage emotions							
Interpersonal Skills							
Interacts with caregiver							
Engages in parallel play							
Interacts with others							
Engages in cooperative interactions							
Responsibility							
Recognizes steps in familiar routines							
Follows familiar routines							
Follows rules							
Applies rules to situations							
Problem-Solving							
Initiates an action to get a desired effect							
Uses trial & error to manipulate objects							
Searches for possible solutions							
Finds alternative strategies & solutions							
Learning							
Demonstrates curiosity							
Sustains attention to preferred activities							
Sustains attention to							

challenging activities							
Applies creativity to activities							

Rating Scale 2. Group:

Group Activity Rating Scale **0-6 Ratings: 0 = Not Evident; 1 = Introduces; 2 = Emerging; 3 = Developing; 4 = Ongoing;** **5 = Demonstrated; 6 = Applied** **Date:** **Teacher:** **Standard Area: Social-Emotional** **Activity(ies):**										
Child Name										
Sense of Self & Others										
Demonstrates self-awareness										
Demonstrates independence										
Engages with others										
Demonstrates respect for self and others										
Manages Emotions										
Expresses a variety of emotions										
Responds to a variety of emotions										
Manages emotions with adult assistance										
Uses strategies to manage emotions										
Interpersonal Skills										
Interacts with caregiver										
Engages in parallel play										
Interacts with others										
Engages in cooperative interactions										
Responsibility										
Recognizes steps in familiar routines										

Follows familiar routines										
Follows rules										
Applies rules to situations										
Problem-Solving										
Initiates an action to get a desired effect										
Uses trial & error to manipulate objects										
Searches for possible solutions										
Finds alternative strategies & solutions										
Learning										
Demonstrates curiosity										
Sustains attention to preferred activities										
Sustains attention to challenging activities										
Applies creativity to activities										

Rating Scale 3: Group (Blank)

Group Activity Rating Scale **0-6 Ratings: 0= Not Evident; 1= Introduces; 2= Emerging; 3= Developing; 4= Ongoing;** **5= Demonstrated; 6= Applied** **Date:** **Teacher:** **Standard Area: Social-Emotional** **Activity(ies):**										
Child Name										

Appendix F

Individual Student Strengths Profile (The content of this tool can be amended as needed, e.g., goals, activities):

Date: **Teacher:** **Child Name:**		
Classroom Activity	**Classroom Expectation**	**Child's Level of Performance**
Arrival		**Strength _____** **Average _____** **Area of Concern _____** **IEP Goal ____**
Circle Time		**Strength _____** **Average _____** **Area of Concern _____** **IEP Goal ____**
Small-group Time		**Strength _____** **Average _____** **Area of Concern _____** **IEP Goal ____**
Free-choice Time		**Strength _____** **Average _____** **Area of Concern _____** **IEP Goal ____**
Clean-up & Transition		**Strength _____** **Average _____** **Area of Concern _____** **IEP Goal ____**

Snack or Meal Time		**Strength _____** **Average _____** **Area of Concern _____** **IEP Goal ____**
Outdoor Time		**Strength _____** **Average _____** **Area of Concern _____** **IEP Goal ____**
Departure		**Strength _____** **Average _____** **Area of Concern _____** **IEP Goal ____**

Appendix G

Portfolio content may include, but not limited to:

The content examples can be scanned and/or uploaded into a teacher computer and then uploaded into the ISTAR-KR database per individual matrix page.

- ✓ Teacher observation and other records gathered
- ✓ Development rating scale, checklists, ISTAR-KR report
- ✓ Parent comments and completed ISTAR-KR matrices
- ✓ Dated series of child's artwork or writing
- ✓ Photographs of child demonstrating skills/engaged in activities
- ✓ Audiotapes, videotapes of child speaking, singing, telling stories
- ✓ List of favorite books, songs, finger plays, activities, friends

Appendix H

Is Your Classroom Practice Effective?

Date: _____

Classroom: _____

Team: _____ _____ _____

_____ _____ _____

Indicator	Yes	No	Not Sure	Example
Do children spend most of their time playing and working with materials or with other children?				
Do children have a variety of activities from which to choose throughout the day?				
Do teachers work with large group, small group, and individual children at different times during the day?				
Is children's work used to decorate the classroom (artwork, writing samples, stories they have dictated)?				

Are the learning experiences provided meaningful to children? (culturally relevant, child interests)				
Do children work on projects and have long periods of time to play and explore?				
Do children play and explore outside every day?				
Do teachers read books to children in small groups and to individual children throughout the day?				
Is the curriculum adapted to meet the needs of those who are ahead and those in need of more support?				
Do the children and their families feel safe and valued in their early childhood program?				

CLASSROOM PRACTICE REFLECTION

How will you proactively address responses that were “No” and “Not Sure”?

What could you change today? How?

What could you change next month? How?

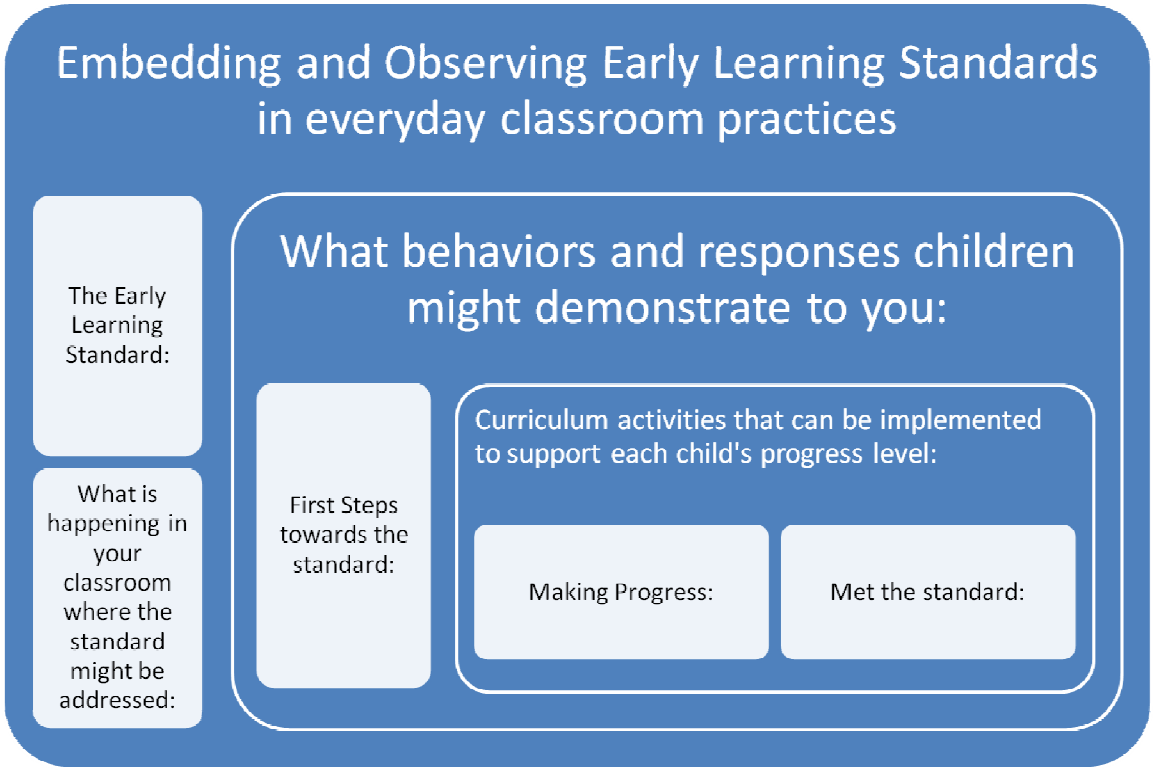
What could you change next school year? How?
Who do you need to enlist to support the changes?

What resources do you need to make changes?

Adapted from *Building Blocks for Teaching Preschoolers with Special Needs, Second Edition*, Susan R. Sandall and Ilene S. Schwartz, 2009

Appendix I

Adapted from Gronlund, *Making Early Learning Standards Come Alive: Connecting Your Practice and Curriculum to State Guidelines, 2006*



Appendix J

Child-Directed Activity Exploration
(Include Early Learning Standards per Activity)

Blocks	**Art**	**Sensory Table**
Dramatic Play		**Library**
Manipulatives		**Writing Center**

Ongoing Projects

Reading and Writing	**Math Experiences**	**Scientific Investigations**
Strategies to Relationship Building	**Individual Student Activity Adjustments**	

Large Motor Skill Opportunities			**Outdoor Explorations**		
Observations for the Week				**How children's thinking will be challenged**	
Teacher-Directed Large Group Time	**Monday**	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**
Teacher-Directed Small Group Time					

Weekly Lesson Plan Reflection

Date _____ Teacher _____

What Worked Well	What Did Not Work Well
Individual Student Information	**Considerations for Future Plans**

Appendix K

Early Childhood Classroom Weekly Lesson Plan

(Include Early Learning Standards per Activity)

Date Nov. 2-6, 2009 Teacher Kristie

Child-Directed Activity Exploration

Blocks
Construct roads & ramps & measure how far balls, marbles, & cars will go on them.

Art
Encourage creativity with collage materials: yarn, button, glitter, fabric & paper scraps.

Sensory Table
Flaxseed to measure, pour, compare quantities

Dramatic Play
Costume Box for children to create own costumes: Fabric, scarves, hats, jewelry, shoes, capes, wands, pouches

Library
Read Together: "The Pumpkin Seed" "Rain Makes Applesauce" "All for All"

Manipulatives
To practice Self Help skills: Boots, lacing boards, zippers, jackets, mittons & gloves to put on

Ongoing Projects
Harvest

Writing Center
Children dictate stories & experiences with pumpkins, apples, & family feasts. Illustrate.

Reading and Writing
Read - "Rain Makes Applesauce!" Children follow pattern in book. Make picture recipe & follow to make applesauce

Math Experiences
Sort & classify apples, squash, seeds, nuts, leaves, pinecones, herbs, flowers

Scientific Investigations
Place rotting pumpkins in a clear tub to observe. Keep on-going journal of changes.

Strategies to Relationship Building
Help children use "I feel" statements when conflicts occur. Offer hugs & high 5's

Individual Student Activity Adjustments
Help Jack make positive choices at center time, follow-up & encourage him.

See if Julie will try the Flax seed in sensory table since it's not wet.

Sample ECE Weekly Classroom Plan January, 2010
Adapted from *Early Learning Standards and Staff Development by Gaye Gronlund and Marlyn James, 2008*

Large Motor Skill Opportunities	Outdoor Explorations
Set-up beanbag pumpkin game. Practice throwing over- + under-hand	Collect leaves + twigs to add to collage materials. Give children 2, 3, + 4-step directions as an obstacle course

Observations for the Week	How children's thinking will be challenged
Note who catches on to pattern in "Applesauce" book. Kristie: observe Jack, Julie, Max, Alia, Sam Linda: observe Ben, Katy, Eli, Emma, Sara	Encourage children to describe the similarities + differences between the sorting items - (apples, squash, etc.) Record their comments on a chart

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Teacher-Directed Large Group Time	Sing Gathering songs, play active games. Settle down →				
	Read "Rain Makes Applesauce"	Look at rotting pumpkins. Discuss. Read "Pumpkin Seed"	Discuss sorting items + read chart + comment	Re-read "Rain Makes Applesauce" Have children help	Tell something each child did this week. Reread "Pumpkin Seed".
Teacher-Directed Small Group Time	Make Applesauce → Help children read picture recipe	→	Sort + Classify Items using a floor graph or yarn circles	→	Help children with self-help skills with their own coats, boots, gloves, mittens

Sample ECE Weekly Classroom Plan January, 2010
Adapted from *Early Learning Standards and Staff Development by Gaye Gronlund and Marlyn James, 2008*

Appendix L

Effective Goal Content Evaluation

1. Does the goal represent alignment to the general curriculum and a vision for the future?

2. Will the goal promote skills needed to participate and be successful in everyday routines and activities?

3. Is the goal measureable?

4. Is the goal based on the child's needs and interests?

5. Can the goal be addressed across settings and people?

6. Does the goal promote independence?

7. Does the goal promote inclusion and support of child's contributions to the group?

8. Does the goal reflect general age-level expectations?

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